

UPDATE

Arthritis

Forty-three million Americans report that a doctor told them they have arthritis or other rheumatic conditions. Another 23 million people have chronic joint symptoms but have not been diagnosed with arthritis. Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States, limiting the activities of more than 16 million adults.

Types of Arthritis and Rheumatic Conditions

Osteoarthritis (OA)

Osteoarthritis is a disease characterized by degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint as well as bony overgrowth. The breakdown of these tissues eventually leads to pain and joint stiffness. The joints most commonly affected are the knees, hips, and those in the hands and spine. The specific causes of osteoarthritis are unknown, but are believed to be a result of both mechanical and molecular events in the affected joint. Disease onset is gradual and usually begins after the age of 40. There is currently no cure for OA.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

Rheumatoid arthritis is a systemic inflammatory disease which manifests itself in multiple joints of the body. The inflammatory process primarily affects the lining of the joints (synovial membrane), but can also affect other organs. The inflamed synovium leads to erosions of the cartilage and bone and possibly joint deformity. Pain, swelling, and redness are common joint manifestations. Although the definitive causes are unknown, RA is believed to be the result of a faulty immune response. RA can begin at any age and is associated with fatigue and prolonged stiffness after rest. There is no cure for RA, but new drugs are increasingly available to treat the disease.

Gout

Gout is a rheumatic disease resulting from deposition of uric acid crystals (monosodium urate) in tissues and fluids within the body. This process is caused by an overproduction or under excretion of uric acid.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE)

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system produces antibodies to cells within the body leading to widespread inflammation and tissue damage. The causes of SLE are unknown but are believed to be linked to genetic, environmental, and hormonal factors. SLE may be characterized by periods of illness and remissions. SLE predominately affects women between the ages of 15 and 40 and blacks more than whites.

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a syndrome predominately characterized by muscular pains and fatigue. The causes of fibromyalgia are unknown; however researchers hypothesize that genetics and, physical and emotional stressors are possible contributory factors to the development of the illness.

